

# Understand Turkey

## **TURKEY TODAY.....556**

Turkey has recently experienced suicide bomb incidents, conflict in Southeastern Anatolia and a failed military coup.

## **HISTORY .....558**

Follow an epic saga stretching across millennia from ancient Anatolia to post-Atatürk Turkey.

## **ARCHITECTURE .....573**

From Roman theatres to Ottoman palaces, Turkey's architecture offers travellers a chance to see history in a tangible form.

## **ARTS.....577**

Turkish culture is livelier than an Istanbul nightclub: a heady mix of carpets, Orhan Pamuk novels and moody films.

## **PEOPLE .....581**

As well as the Turks, you might meet Kurds, Laz, Hemşin, Yörük, Jews, Greeks, Armenians, Circassians, Abkhazians...

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The country linking Europe and Asia has some major assets, but faces challenges caused by rapid development.

# Turkey Today

After over a decade of strong economic growth, Turks have seen their standard of living rise significantly, but long-standing issues remain – including the Kurdish conflict and juggling Islamic and secular lifestyles – and a failed coup increased these tensions. The war in Syria has brought Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) suicide bombers to İstanbul while Turkey has become the refugees' route to Europe, prompting a deal for Turkey to take back refugees in exchange for EU privileges.

## Best on Film

**Mustang** (2015) Turkish-French film about orphaned sisters in a remote village.

**Innocence of Memories** (2015) Documentary about Orhan Pamuk's Museum of Innocence.

**Winter Sleep** (2014) Poignant character study in snowy Anatolia.

**The Cut** (2014) Drama by Turkish-German director Fatih Akin, set during the Armenian tragedy of 1915.

**Once Upon a Time in Anatolia** (2011) Night-time search for a corpse on the steppe.

## Best in Print

**The Architect's Apprentice** (Elif Şafak) The magical realist's tale of Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan.

**A Strangeness in My Mind** (Orhan Pamuk) 20th-century İstanbul through the eyes of an Anatolian street hawk.

**Birds Without Wings** (Louis de Bernières) *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* author covers the Turkish-Greek population exchange.

**The Janissary Tree** (Jason Goodwin) First in the Yashim series about a eunuch detective in 19th-century İstanbul.

**Turkish Awakening** (Alev Scott) Turkish-British writer's personal discovery of modern Turkey.

## Political Turmoil

Turkey's troubled period of suicide bombings and conflict with Kurdish insurgents seemingly reached a nadir in July 2016, when a faction of the military instigated a coup against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). The night of drama saw the Turkish parliament bombed and a military blockade of İstanbul's Bosphorus Bridge – subsequently renamed the 15th July Martyrs' Bridge for the civilian lives lost in the thwarted putsch. The AKP responded by dismissing or detaining over 100,000 suspected plotters from judges and generals to civil servants and teachers, and lobbied the US to extradite the accused coup mastermind, Turkish cleric Fetullah Gülen. Some 38,000 prisoners were released early to accommodate arrested plotters, and Amnesty International raised concerns about treatment of detainees.

## Terrorist Attacks

The coup came against a background of increased violence in Turkey, largely due to the collapse of a two-year ceasefire with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The virtual civil war between the Turkish military and Kurdish insurgents in southeastern Anatolia is bleakly symbolised by Cizre, where the deserted, bullet-riddled houses reflect those found across the nearby Syrian border. PKK splinter group the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK) has also carried out bomb attacks in Ankara and İstanbul. Meanwhile, ISIL suicide bombers struck locations including İstanbul's Hippodrome, the city's main thoroughfare İstiklal Caddesi, and Atatürk International Airport.

## Economic Progress

The 2016 coup was an unwelcome flashback for a country that once experienced a coup every decade, but has recently enjoyed the kind of golden age not seen since its 18th-century Tulip Era. When the AKP came to power in 2002, the Islamic party took a sure hand of the secular